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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S ELECTION STRATEGY

Classified By: E/P Chief Simon Schuchat. Reasons: 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: On April 7, Consul General Cunningham met with Lee Wing-tat, Democratic Party (DP) Chairman to review the party's election strategy. Lee said he welcomed the creation of the Civic Party and seemed pretty confident that the pan-democrats could get the hundred plus Chief Executive Election Committee members needed to nominate an opposition candidate, although Beijing will work hard to prevent it. The pan-democrats had no illusion that a democratic CE candidate could win, but Lee contended that the DP could turn the CE election into a "virtual election" and take advantage of the opportunity to influence public opinion. (Separately, the "Ming Pao" reported that the democrats could potentially win 120 Election Committee seats.) The DP Chief also confirmed that mainland representatives had offered bribes to two DP members; the party will make this information public later this month. End Summary.

Election Strategy

12. (C) On April 7, Consul General Cunningham met with Lee Wing-tat, Democratic Party (DP) Chairman to review the party's election strategy. Lee said he welcomed the creation of the Civic Party and said that the two parties would work well together. He and Civic Party lawmaker Ronny Tong were working together to develop strategy and to prepare for the next major political event -- the 2007 Chief Executive (CE) election. Lee emphasized that the party's CE Election Committee strategy was not yet public knowledge and emphasized the sensitive nature of this information. According to Lee, the DP and Civic Party needed to register voters in the various constituencies now and lay the groundwork for a campaign in the fall. Lee seemed pretty confident they could get the hundred plus members needed to nominate an opposition candidate but acknowledged that Beijing will work hard to prevent that from happening.

13. (C) It was clear that the democratic CE candidate would not be able to win the election, said Lee, but having a candidate would force Tsang to debate a range of issues, including democracy, political reform, a timetable for universal suffrage, as well as social and economic issues. The Chief Executive is expected to produce a new report on political reform (presumably from the Commission on Strategic Development) by the end of this year and will have to defend it during the CE election campaign. The democrats will use that debate to establish the DP as a party with an agenda and platform that goes beyond democracy, but will also energize the public again. With a good, articulate candidate (Lee mentioned former Chief Secretary Anson Chan as an example but just as quickly said he had no idea who might run), the DP could turn the CE election into a "virtual election" because the democratic candidate will have the chance to influence

public opinion. Tsang will not only have to respond to the 800 Election Committee members, but to public opinion as well. Tsang will not want to combine selection by the Election Committee with a poor performance in opinion polls of the general public.

14. (SBU) On April 11, "Ming Pao" published a special investigative report on the pan-democrats' strategy for the September CE Election Committee elections. The newspaper reported that the pan-democrats intended to stage a large-scale campaign to encourage eligible voters to register by the May 16 deadline. If the democrats fared well in the social welfare, legal, medical, health services, higher education, education and accountancy sub-sector elections and if one included the 25 pro-democracy Legco members who are automatically members of the Election Committee, the pan-democrats could potentially have as many as 120 seats. The "Ming Pao" noted that the pro-Beijing forces had been instructed to counter the democrats' push by fielding their own candidates and keeping the number of pro-democratic Election Committee members below 100. (Note: The efforts of the democrats to aggressively campaign for Election Committee seats is in sharp contrast to their previous boycott of the July 2000 Election Committee elections. At the time, they argued that they did not want to participate in "small circle elections." End Note.)

Some Coordination with the Civic Party

15. (C) Regarding other elections, Lee told the CG that he did not expect DP and Civic Party candidates to compete for the same pro-democracy votes in the District Council elections -- they would coordinate on where to run candidates in order to

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maximize their chances and strengths. The DP has an established organization, which the Civic Party won't have, added Lee. They would, however, be competing with each other in the 2008 Legislative Council elections, since there were a limited number of geographic constituency seats.

Relations with the Government and Factional Issues

16. (C) Lee said that he had no regrets at how things turned out last fall, with the defeat of the Government's reform package. He was now concentrating on deflecting attempts by the press and pro-Beijing forces (and at times the Government and especially Tsang) to paint the DP as an opposition party only intent on obstruction. Lee pointed out that the DP had had a good dialogue with Secretary for Finance Henry Tang on the budget and ultimately supported the Government's budget. The DP also worked well with York Chow, Secretary for Health, Welfare, and Food, and other ministers. The relationship with the CE was a bit different now, although they did talk. Still, Lee thought that the Government would try to maximize its support per issue, rather than relying on a fixed support base from pro-Government parties such as the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and the Liberal Party. Lee explained that the DP had supported the HKG on the budget after some concessions by Tang, and would support the Government on the construction of Government headquarters at Tamar, albeit, with some modifications. He noted that Tsang had mentioned three major projects in his policy address last October: constitutional reform, the West Kowloon Cultural District, and Tamar. Lee said that since the first two projects were considered either failed or stalled, getting support for the Tamar project was very important to Tsang. He was sure that Beijing had told the DAB to drop its opposition.

17. (C) The Consul General asked Lee if the negative attacks in the media regarding contact between the USG and the DP or the Civic Party were causing the parties any problems. He replied no, that this type of speculation had been going on

for some time. Separately, Lee confirmed that mainland representatives had offered bribes to two DP members. In mid March (around the time of the Civic Party's official launch) Lee revealed during a press conference that there had been a mysterious increase in membership applications to the party and possible bribe attempts. Lee assigned a taskforce to investigate these allegations. It seemed likely, added Lee, that others had been offered bribes and not reported it. The party will be making this information public, with the individuals involved, later this month. (Comment: There is speculation that the internal probe is actually a battle between Lee and another DP faction unhappy with Lee's leadership of the party. End Comment)
Cunningham